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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000692

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EUR/NCE FOR ERIC FICHTE, WHA/AND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/2016

TAGS: PREL KDEM PGOV VE EAID EZ

SUBJECT: CZECHS SUPPORT EU CRITICISM OF VENEZUELAN NGO LAW,
BUT DO NOT PLAN TO ISSUE SEPARATE BILATERAL MESSAGE TO
VENEZUELA

REF: STATE 97547

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Counselor
Karen C. Reider for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff met with Petr Janousek, Czech MFA Desk Officer of the Americas Department, June 19 to discuss Venezuela's draft NGO law. Janousek said a delegation of EU Ambassadors in Caracas met in early June with Saul Ortega, President of the Permanent Commission for External Policies in the Venezuelan National Assembly, to voice concerns with the law. The Czechs supported the EU position, which Janousek said is critical of the law for reasons similar to those of the U.S (i.e., the law could hinder the ability of NGOs to function within Venezuela and make it difficult for foreign donors to financially support them). However, because the EU has recently spoken with one voice on the law, the Czechs do not see value in issuing a separate message to Venezuela.

¶2. (C) Comment. The Czech decision should not be viewed as reluctance to support democracy in Venezuela generally. Given limited resources, the Czechs tend to focus their efforts on priority countries like Cuba, Belarus, Iraq, Burma, and the Balkans. However, MFA officials have expressed concern with the erosion of democracy in Venezuela and have even considered adding Venezuela to its priority country list.

CABANISS